



## The provisional IRA: A case study

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# The Provisional IRA: A Case Study

C.J.M. Drake

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The Provisional Irish Republican Army (PIRA) is a militant, nationalist organisation which aims at ending British rule in Northern Ireland by violent means and at establishing a united Irish republic. It has the support of a substantial proportion of Northern Irish Catholics, and sufficient armaments to continue its campaign for the foreseeable future. The quality of the ordinary PIRA recruits is quite high, and its leadership has shown itself capable of adapting political and military strategy to changing circumstances. However, despite achieving a great deal, it is unlikely that the PIRA can overcome the hostility of Northern Irish Protestants to Irish unity, and by its campaign it has exacerbated that hostility.

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The tradition of militant republican nationalism in Ireland dates back to the United Irishmen of the 1790s. The Provisional Irish Republican Army (PIRA) is the result of a split in the Irish Republican Army (IRA) which occurred in 1969. Under the treaty of 1921 which ended a three-year guerrilla war with the IRA, the British government withdrew their forces from 26 of the 32 counties of Ireland. In those 26 predominantly Catholic counties the Irish Free State was established, with the British monarch as titular head of state. In the other six north-eastern counties which overall, though not individually, had a Protestant majority, the British ruled but locally governed state of Northern Ireland was established. A civil war was waged across the 26 counties in 1922–23, in which the Free State forces defeated the anti-treaty Republicans. Following this some of the Republicans reformed as the IRA and its political equivalent Sinn Féin. The IRA waged a sporadic terrorist campaign across Ireland to little avail. After 1948 when the Free State declared itself a republic, the IRA largely confined its military actions to Northern Ireland whilst maintaining its headquarters in Dublin.

The IRA denied the legitimacy of the parliaments in Dublin and Belfast, and denied the right of Britain to rule or govern Northern Ireland. They held that the legitimate government of Ireland rested with those members of Dáil Éireann (the Irish Parliament) who had voted against accepting the treaty in December 1921, the other deputies being deemed traitors. In December 1938 the surviving anti-treaty deputies transferred their responsibilities to the ruling body of the IRA, the IRA Army Council, thus making it the legitimate government of Ireland from a republican perspective.<sup>1</sup>

In the mid-1960s some of the IRA Army Council, led by the Chief of Staff, Cathal Goulding, tried to move the IRA away from what they saw as futile efforts to end partition by force alone. They believed that in order to unite Ireland it would be necessary to form a left-wing, non-sectarian workers' movement across Ireland as a whole. The Catholic and Protestant workers together would overthrow capitalism in Ireland and establish a united Irish socialist state.<sup>2</sup> This move split the IRA for two reasons. First, it offended the conservatism and Catholicism of many members of the IRA and Sinn Féin throughout Ireland.<sup>3</sup> Second, it ignored the special position of the IRA in Northern Ireland as the defender of the urban Catholic enclaves during sectarian riots such as those of 1920–22 and 1935.<sup>4</sup>

The IRA reforms of the 1960s led to many men leaving the organisation. This, allied to the lack of weaponry caused by the marginalisation of the IRA's military role, meant that when sectarian rioting broke out in August 1969 the IRA was unable to protect the northern Catholics.<sup>5</sup> The northern IRA had long felt that the IRA Army Council, dominated as it was by southerners, was remote from the problems which they faced.<sup>6</sup> In December 1969 the IRA Special Convention voted to end abstentionism and send elected Sinn Féin candidates to the parliaments in Dublin, Belfast, and London. To traditional IRA men this was tantamount to recognising the legitimacy of these bodies and thus of partition. Accordingly, several northerners and traditionalists, led by Sean MacStiofain, split off to form the PIRA, followed the next month by the formation of Provisional Sinn Féin (PSF).<sup>7</sup>

The basic ideology of PIRA is fairly similar to that of the pre-1960s IRA. The 'treachery' of the IRA Army Council in 1969 in recognising the illegitimate parliaments in Dublin and Belfast meant that the mantle of the legitimate government of Ireland passed to the PIRA Army Council.<sup>8</sup> According to the PIRA official handbook, 'The Green Book', one of the main objects of the PIRA is '[to] support the establishment of an Irish Socialist Republic based on the 1916 Proclamation.'<sup>9</sup>

The PIRA considers itself to be the republican vanguard, responsible for protecting the integrity of the republican movement. The PIRA follows the old IRA in not accepting that the majority will should prevail if it is incorrect. In the 1920s a republican activist stated 'The people of a nation may not voluntarily surrender their independence . . . if a majority is found that would vote for such a surrender, the vote is invalid legally and morally and a minority is justified in upholding the independence of their country.'<sup>10</sup> Gerry Adams, President of PSF and allegedly a former PIRA chief of staff, has voiced similar sentiments.<sup>11</sup>

The PIRA claims to be a socialist organisation. In the early 1970s it is doubtful whether any coherent ideology apart from republican nationalism played a role. The late Seamus Twomey, a former Officer Commanding

(OC) Belfast Brigade and PIRA chief of staff, is quoted as having said 'At heart I am a socialist . . . I have been involved in setting up trade unions and so forth. But at the same time I am a right winger.'<sup>12</sup> In a 1977 newspaper article journalist David Blundy judged that Twomey and Joe Cahill, OC Belfast April–August 1971, would feel ideologically at home on the right wing of the British Conservative Party.<sup>13</sup> Blundy also quoted Martin McGuinness, allegedly OC Derry and later PIRA Chief of Staff, as defining PIRA policy as ' . . . blattering on until the Brits leave'.<sup>14</sup>

PIRA military strategy is still largely concerned with 'blattering away'. In the early 1970s the PIRA tended to engage the British Army in gunbattles, whilst deploying car bombs in the city centres of Derry and Belfast. The deployment of car bombs forced the army to disperse its forces, thus precluding any army assaults upon the 'no-go' areas of the Bogside and Lower Falls. The car bombs in commercial centres also formed part of an 'economic campaign' by which PIRA hoped to turn Northern Ireland into an economic drain upon the British Treasury. The aim of the PIRA was to make Northern Ireland ungovernable.<sup>15</sup> Incidents such as the Falls Road Curfew of 1970, with its attendant house searches and use of tear gas, the introduction of internment in 1971, and the shooting dead of 13 nationalist demonstrators in Derry by the army on 'Bloody Sunday' in January 1972, produced several recruits for PIRA.<sup>16</sup> In 1972 there were an estimated 700 volunteers in Belfast alone.<sup>17</sup> The successful smuggling into Northern Ireland of several hundred Armalite rifles in 1970–71 and of a number of RPG7 shoulder-held rocket launchers in late 1972 meant that in some respects the PIRA were more heavily armed than the British Army (although the inexperience of the volunteers largely negated this).<sup>18</sup> The intensity of the fighting can be judged from the fact that in the period 1971–74 over 20,000 shooting incidents were recorded, whereas in the period 1975–1988 there were less than 10,000.<sup>19</sup>

While this produced heavy army casualties, 232 regular soldiers being killed in the period 1971–74, the PIRA also sustained heavy casualties, losing 106 volunteers dead in the period 1969–73.<sup>20</sup> The PIRA also suffered badly from three factors. First, there was very little coordination between areas such as Belfast, Derry, and South Armagh, or indeed within Belfast itself. While this gave maximum scope to local initiative it precluded the simultaneous execution of operations in order to overstretch the army.<sup>21</sup> Second, the relatively large units in which the PIRA operated were open to penetration by the Royal Ulster Constabulary (RUC) and informers. The nominal organisation of the PIRA into companies, battalions, and brigades, with some Belfast companies containing up to 50 men, meant that one informer could name several men. As a result several experienced PIRA volunteers were arrested.<sup>22</sup>

Last, the PIRA's emphasis on physical force, largely to the exclusion of

any other political philosophy, meant that it was unable to react to any change in the political climate, and in the absence of action was likely to atrophy. Thus, although the destruction of the Northern Irish government at Stormont had been the initial aim of the PIRA, when this occurred in July 1972 the first reaction of the PIRA leaders was to carry on fighting to force British withdrawal.<sup>23</sup> When the PIRA leaders negotiated with Government ministers in July 1972, apart from demanding the complete withdrawal of troops by 1975 they had no other long-term objectives and do not appear to have considered the consequences of withdrawal.<sup>24</sup>

The consequences of reliance on force were also seen in the period of the ceasefire of 1975–76. Without the stimulus of action against the security forces, the PIRA degenerated into sectarian warfare with the Ulster Defence Association (UDA) and the Ulster Volunteer Force (UVF), and an internecine feud with the Official IRA (OIRA).<sup>25</sup> Martin McGuinness, allegedly OC Derry at the time, believes that the lack of action led to a drop in morale and recruiting.<sup>26</sup> According to Gerry Adams: 'When the struggle was limited to armed struggle, the prolongation of the truce meant that there was no struggle at all. There was nothing but confusion, frustration, and demoralisation, arising directly from what I call "spectator politics"'.<sup>27</sup> As a result of the near debacle of the ceasefire period the then largely southern leadership was replaced over the next few years by younger men from the north. One major result was that the political tone of PIRA and PSF moved sharply leftwards. The 'Green Book' specifically states that 'All potential volunteers must be socialist in outlook'.<sup>28</sup> On the other hand Adams himself has stated, 'I don't think that socialism is on the agenda at all at this stage except for the political activists of the left. What's on the agenda now is an end to Partition. You won't get near socialism until you have national independence'.<sup>29</sup> Interviews with ranking members of PIRA suggest that priority is given to winning the war against the British.<sup>30</sup>

Since the successful election of the H-Block hunger striker Bobby Sands to Westminster in 1981, PSF has evolved a political strategy which is complementary to, but not wholly dependent upon, the armed struggle. In 1982 PSF set up advice bureaux across Northern Ireland to help applicants in dealing with the authorities on social matters such as housing and social security benefits. According to Bishop and Mallie: 'By 1984 Sinn Féin was established in the ghettos of Belfast and Derry as the most efficient means of redress against the agencies of the State, with more advice bureaux than the rest of the Northern Ireland political parties put together'.<sup>31</sup>

It has also contested elections in Northern Ireland at the local, national, and European level and has also contested elections in the Republic. At the 1981 PSF *ard fheis* (annual conference) the then Publicity Director Danny Morrison accurately described republican strategy as a combination of the ballot box and the Armalite. In the British general elections of 1983 and

1987 PSF managed to obtain between 35 and 42 per cent of the nationalist vote (11–13 per cent of the total Northern Irish vote) thus demonstrating a fairly solid bedrock of support for the militant republican line.<sup>32</sup>

In the Republic on the other hand, the PSF vote ranged from a modest 4.9 per cent in the 1984 European elections to a derisory 1.85 per cent in the 1987 elections to the Dail thus demonstrating the irrelevance of the North to southern voters, and their rejection of the PIRA's methods.<sup>33</sup> In 1985 at the PSF *ard fheis* the policy whereby elected PSF candidates abstained from taking up their seats in the Dail was overturned. Interestingly as well as many of the early leaders of PIRA, the last surviving anti-treaty deputy of the 1921 Dail, Tom Maguire, who had backed PIRA in the 1969 split, opposed the ending of abstentionism. He was ignored.<sup>34</sup>

On the military side, in 1976–77 PIRA was reorganised in the cities from the above-mentioned semi-military structure to a system of 5-12-man cells, or Active Service Units (ASUs), linked only at brigade level by the cell leaders, with specialist cells dealing with sniping, bomb making and other specialised activities. In the rural areas the existing system was preferred by the local volunteers and was therefore retained. In theory a system of closed cells, operating on a 'need to know' basis, should have greatly improved security. However, in closely knit societies such as West Belfast, where everybody knows everybody, it is very difficult to ensure that such hermetic isolation exists.<sup>35</sup> The highly decentralised nature of the PIRA, particularly since the formation of a separate Northern Command in 1976, has meant that to a very large extent local commanders, especially in the border areas, have a great deal of discretion in carrying out operations.<sup>36</sup> One commentator goes so far as to say that in order to avoid discouraging initiative and causing possible schisms, the PIRA leadership often retrospectively approves operations which given the choice it would not have authorised.<sup>37</sup> Complex or high profile operations on the other hand are usually planned by General Headquarters (GHQ) and executed by specially selected units.<sup>38</sup>

The military and political reorganisation was also a recognition that the British were not going to be forced to leave Northern Ireland soon, and that therefore the PIRA had to prepare for a long war. Up until March 1976 according to Bishop and Mallie, or March 1977 according to Kelley, the PIRA had publicly declared each year that the next year would be the 'Year of Victory', and that 'one more heave' would force the British to quit.<sup>39</sup> Thus long-term security and the need to build up a durable political base were not thought to be important. However, in a long war, it would be necessary to guard against deep penetration by informers and the security forces, and to build up a solid base of support among the northern Catholics. The reorganisation of the military structure was intended to achieve the former objective, the setting up of PSF advice

bureaux and the 'policing' role assumed by the PIRA in the ghettos was to achieve the latter.<sup>40</sup>

PIRA military strategy is outlined in the 'Green Book' as follows:

1. A war of attrition against enemy personnel which is aimed at causing as many casualties and deaths as possible so as to create a demand from their people at home for their withdrawal.
2. A bombing campaign aimed at making the enemy's financial interest in our country unprofitable while at the same time curbing long term financial investment in our country.
3. To make the Six Counties as at present and for the past several years ungovernable except by colonial military rule.
4. To sustain the war and gain support for its ends by National and International propaganda and publicity campaigns.
5. By defending the war of liberation by punishing criminals, collaborators and informers.<sup>41</sup>

Military strategy since the reorganisation has been affected by three factors; the available weaponry, the British government's policy of 'Ulsterisation'-withdrawing the army into a supporting role, giving primacy to the RUC and the locally-raised Ulster Defence Regiment (UDR), and the perceived need to shape military strategy to meet political objectives. In terms of its weaponry the PIRA has proved capable of designing and manufacturing complicated devices such as mortars (since 1979) and radio-controlled bombs (since August 1974).<sup>42</sup> The introduction of new weapons such as the Armalite rifle, the RPG7 rocket launcher, the mortar, and the remote controlled bomb in the 1970s increased the capability of the PIRA to carry out operations in Northern Ireland. The development of the mercury tilt switch by the Irish National Liberation Army (INLA) in 1979, which they used to kill Airey Neave MP, has made it easier for assassins to plant a device, and be well clear when the movement of the car detonates it. Similarly, the PIRA now has devices, adapted from the technology used in video recorders, which allows bombs to be set to detonate months in advance. Such a device was used by the PIRA as early as 1977, and was the device used in the Brighton bombing of 1984.<sup>43</sup>

The extent to which the PIRA remains wedded to the use of a particular weapon whilst refining it in order to keep abreast of current developments can be seen in the deployment of the vehicle bomb. (Strictly speaking the term car bomb is too specific as other forms of vehicle such as buses and trucks have also been used.) The vehicle bomb can take the form of an explosive device, usually small, attached to a vehicle in the hope of killing the occupants. Alternatively, a vehicle can be loaded with a large amount of explosive in the hope of killing people or damaging structures in the vicinity.

In the former case the PIRA has made successful attacks against Ian Gow MP, and several members of the Crown forces in England and Northern Ireland.<sup>44</sup> People surviving such attacks include the former Cabinet Secretary, Lord Armstrong, and the Commandant-General of the Royal Marines, Sir Steuart Pringle, who lost a leg in the explosion.<sup>45</sup> In the early and mid-1970s such devices were bulky, and were detonated by relatively crude trembler devices which were oversensitive and prone to detonate prematurely, as occurred in 1975 when a bomb intended for an MP killed an eminent cancer surgeon.<sup>46</sup> With the development of the mercury tilt switch in 1979, and the acquisition of large quantities of Semtex plastic explosive in the mid-1980s, it became possible to develop small, reliable bombs, that would detonate only when the car was started.

Vehicles are also used as a means of transporting large bombs to locations where they can be detonated causing the maximum possible damage to the chosen target, preferably when the volunteer responsible is no longer in the vicinity. In the early 1970s most bombs were made from unstable ingredients and had fairly crude detonators, a problem which caused the premature death of 44 of the 106 PIRA volunteers killed between 1969 and 1973.<sup>47</sup> Furthermore, such bombs were bulky and were thus hard to carry without the use of several volunteers and the consequent risk of detection.<sup>48</sup> By placing the bomb in a vehicle and driving it to the target before priming the detonator, it was possible to safely transport a large bomb over a distance using only one volunteer.

The development of a reliable timing device in 1971, based upon the timer in a parking meter, meant that the volunteers parking car bombs had up to two hours to get clear of the scene of the explosion.<sup>49</sup> In 1971 and 1972 such devices were used effectively in the 'economic campaign' in Belfast and Derry. Although the authorities were usually warned when a bomb was left in a public place, on some occasions civilians were killed, particularly when several bombs were placed in a short period and the authorities were unable to evacuate civilians in the time given. The prime example of such a case was 'Bloody Friday' in July 1972 when 22 vehicle bombs exploded in central Belfast killing five members of the Crown forces and four civilians, and injuring nearly 300 civilians.<sup>50</sup> A car bomb killed six shoppers outside Harrods in London in December 1983, but, although planted by a PIRA cell, the organisation has always claimed that this was not an authorised operation.<sup>51</sup>

When combined with the use of remote-controlled detonators, vehicle bombs have been used to effect against targets thought likely to pass by a given spot. Thus in 1987 Justice Gibson and his wife were killed by a car bomb which exploded as they passed, just inside Northern Ireland as they returned from a holiday abroad. The PIRA had known that they would pass that way and had placed the car bomb accordingly, with an



observer equipped with the remote trigger overlooking the location.<sup>52</sup> Such vehicle bombs have also been used against military targets. In July 1981 a van loaded with a large nail bomb exploded outside Chelsea Barracks in London as a coach containing soldiers passed by. This was the first use of a remote-controlled bomb in England.<sup>53</sup> The most effective use of such a device against the army occurred in August 1979 when a truck bomb, combined with another bomb, killed 18 soldiers at the Narrow Water near Warrenpoint, County Down in Northern Ireland.<sup>54</sup>

From 1972 onwards, and to a greater extent from 1974, the PIRA has used so-called 'proxy bombs'. In order to avoid the possibility of volunteers being arrested while stealing a suitable vehicle or driving the bomb to the target in a stolen car, the PIRA has forced civilians, by threatening themselves or their families, to drive a vehicle bomb to the intended target. Often the civilian's own car is used, thus avoiding the risk of it appearing on a police check list. On one occasion a bus driver was forced to drive his bus, laden with an 800lb bomb to an RUC station.<sup>55</sup> In these cases the bombs were detonated by a timing device and the 'proxies' were given enough time to get clear before the bomb exploded.<sup>56</sup>

In a further refinement on 24 October 1990, the PIRA used what the press dubbed 'human bombs'. These were similar to the suicide bombings in the Lebanon with the difference that the drivers were not willing participants. In the three cases so far [January 1991], all on the same day but in different parts of Northern Ireland, the PIRA deliberately selected Catholics deemed to be 'collaborators' (i.e. someone who worked in an army kitchen or sold goods or services to the Crown forces). The men were strapped into bomb-laden vehicles and, under the threat of harm to their families, drove the vehicles into army bases or checkpoints. Once there the bombs exploded, as a result of which six soldiers and one of the drivers were killed. It is not yet clear whether the bombs were detonated by timing devices, by remote control, or by a detonator triggered by the driver trying to escape. It is clear that the drivers were intended to be killed in the explosions. Thus the 'human bombs' served the double purpose of getting bombs close to army posts and killing soldiers with the minimal risk to PIRA volunteers, and of discouraging 'collaboration' by the Catholic population (thus minimising the risk of the Crown forces using such people, probably without their knowledge, as a source of inside information).<sup>57</sup> In an incident in November 1990 a so-called 'collaborator' was forced to drive a vehicle containing a bomb of over 3500lb. The bomb failed to explode. The driver was not strapped into the vehicle and a timing device was used as the detonator.<sup>58</sup>

As an example of the integration of a weapon into overall strategy one can look at the use of mortars in the north. By attacking RUC stations with mortars, and then intimidating and killing contractors who repair

the damage or help to build new stations, the PIRA has put the security forces in the position where either the RUC abandons the stations, or the work has to be carried out by the Royal Engineers. As the RUC expanded fourfold between 1969 and 1986, the repairs have to be made and new stations have to be built.<sup>59</sup> This exposes the soldiers to attack, thus fulfilling the PIRA's aim of killing them in preference to members of the RUC or UDR.<sup>60</sup> Off-duty RUC and UDR men present a softer target than soldiers, therefore several have been killed. However, in both 1988 and 1989 the number of soldiers killed exceeded the combined total of RUC and UDR killed.<sup>61</sup>

More recent developments have made it likely that the PIRA will be able to operate with increased effectiveness. Early in 1990 the security forces discovered that the PIRA were fitting their mortar bombs with a gyroscopic device which should mean that a greater percentage of impact-detonated mortar shells will land at an angle of 90 degrees and detonate.<sup>62</sup> A recent trial in the USA has shown that the PIRA has the potential to develop sophisticated anti-aircraft missiles using American technicians and laboratories.<sup>63</sup>

Although such developments are of importance, the PIRA's capability was most greatly enhanced by the armaments shipments supplied by the Libyan government between 1985 and 1987. The trial in France of the PIRA members involved in shipping the Libyan weapons has confirmed the vast size of the shipments.<sup>64</sup> Although no exact statistics are available, estimates suggest that the PIRA received from the Libyans up to 1,000 AK47 automatic assault rifles, several RPG7 rocket launchers, 12 SAM-7 shoulder-launched ground to air missiles, a number of DSKH 12.7mm heavy anti-aircraft machine guns, and over a tonne of the highly powerful plastic explosive Semtex.<sup>65</sup> Of all of the armaments Semtex is perhaps the most significant due to its power, malleability, and stability which have greatly increased the flexibility of the PIRA. Semtex has been used in car bombs, time bombs, armour-piercing 'Droque' grenades, and mortar bombs. According to journalist David McKittrick the PIRA has enough material to carry on its campaign for at least a decade.<sup>66</sup> Another journalist has stated that at least one PIRA member was trained in Libya in the use of the SAM-7 ground to air missile launcher and others may now be proficient.<sup>67</sup> In an interview in 1988, a senior republican indicated that the PIRA would use its new armaments to bring matters to a head when he said 'This is the final phase. The next eighteen months to two years will be critical because the IRA has the resources and will know then if it has the capacity to end it.'<sup>68</sup>

The PIRA has not confined its attacks in Northern Ireland to the security forces. In addition to the attacks on contractors, they have maintained their attacks on 'economic targets'. Following a car bomb explosion in

central Belfast, a PIRA spokesman issued the following statement, which encapsulates part of the PIRA's thinking: 'Economic investment in Belfast has recently presented the Brits with a propaganda platform from which they have been consciously proclaiming the return to normality. There is no normality.'<sup>69</sup>

A further tactic used by the PIRA since 1973 has been attacks in England, and on the continent. These attacks are often carried out when the PIRA is finding it difficult to operate in the cities of Northern Ireland as was the case in 1973–74, and has been the case for the past two years.<sup>70</sup> The more indiscriminate bomb attacks appear to be designed to bring the issue of Northern Ireland to the attention of the British people. A PIRA spokesman said in 1974, 'Last year taught us that in publicity terms one bomb in Oxford Street is worth ten in Belfast.'<sup>71</sup> The recent attacks upon military targets in England and the continent can be seen as PIRA fulfilling its desire to attack the British armed forces whilst taking fewer risks. Outside Northern Ireland the armed forces' security precautions are less stringent and targets are therefore 'softer'. Between December 1988 and June 1990, 18 soldiers were killed by PIRA in England and on the continent compared with 13 in Northern Ireland.<sup>72</sup>

In the past the PIRA has also targetted people and institutions which it has seen as representing the 'Establishment'. In 1974 Daithi O'Connell warned that PIRA intended to strike at mainland targets of an '... economic, judicial, military and political nature'.<sup>73</sup> Between 1975 and the start of the current campaign a number of VIPs had either been assassinated or had had attempts made against them. These included such people as Hugh Fraser MP (car-bomb), Ross McWhirter (shot dead), the British ambassadors to both the Republic of Ireland and the Netherlands (the former killed by a culvert-bomb, the latter shot dead), and Lord Mountbatten (killed, with others, by a remote-controlled bomb). The PIRA also selected 'Establishment' targets such as London clubs and high class restaurants.<sup>74</sup>

In 1984, in their most audacious operation so far, PIRA nearly succeeded in killing the then Prime Minister, Margaret Thatcher, and most of the cabinet by bombing the Grand Hotel during the Conservative Party Conference at Brighton. Gerry Adams has said that the Brighton bombing was intended to bring matters in Northern Ireland to a head by provoking massive repression, but, given the PIRA's hatred of Mrs Thatcher following the 1981 hunger strikes, it seems likely that a strong element of revenge was also present.<sup>75</sup>

In the current campaign, in addition to military targets, PIRA has targetted 'Establishment' VIPs and institutions. Apart from the successful assassination of Ian Gow MP, attempts have been made upon notables such as the former Governor of Gibraltar, Sir Peter Terry, the former

Cabinet Secretary, Lord Armstrong, and a former paratrooper and Army commander in Northern Ireland Sir Anthony Farrar-Hockley. Institutions which have been bombed include the London Stock Exchange, the Carlton Club, and the barracks of the Honourable Artillery Company. After the killing of Ian Gow and shooting of Sir Peter Terry, a PIRA spokesman said, 'The IRA have quite forcibly told the British, the British Establishment, those who legislate for the war in Ireland, that they too will have to pay a price.'<sup>76</sup>

In order to carry out attacks, both in Northern Ireland and outside, the PIRA needs information. In the case of the current mainland campaign much of the intelligence appears to have been collated from open sources such as *Who's Who*, *The Army List* and *The Civil Service Year Book*.<sup>77</sup> The so called 'hit list' found at a PIRA safe house in Clapham, London, in 1988 appears to have been compiled from open and indeed obsolete sources as was shown by the attacks on the former home of Lord Armstrong, and on the former home of the Conservative Party Treasurer, Lord McAlpine.<sup>78</sup> The compilation of such VIP hit lists appears to be a prerequisite to sustained assassination campaigns, similar lists having been found in 1975 and earlier in 1990.<sup>79</sup>

In Northern Ireland PIRA is able to gather information both through local knowledge and through the infiltration of government institutions. As previously mentioned, the Catholic ghettos are extremely close-knit, and therefore the PIRA would not find it difficult to collect local gossip and so forth. In addition, either PIRA recruits are told to work for bodies such as the Northern Ireland Housing Executive, tax offices, and social security offices where useful information can be obtained, or existing staff are identified and either bribed or intimidated into giving the PIRA information such as the home addresses of members of the RUC or of suspected loyalist paramilitaries.<sup>80</sup> In the late 1970s, the security forces feared that an elite RUC unit, as well as the UDR and the prison service had been penetrated by the PIRA's use of intimidation and bribery.<sup>81</sup> In a recent case a senior prison warder was ensnared in a so-called 'honey-trap' by a suspected female member of the PIRA, and then intimidated into giving targetting information on colleagues to PIRA.<sup>82</sup> The PIRA is also reported to have successfully tapped the telephones at the Army HQ in Lisburn.<sup>83</sup>

The PIRA does have links with foreign terrorist groups but it is unclear how useful these links are in operational terms. PIRA spokesmen have denounced the German Red Army Faction and seem to regard them with some suspicion.<sup>84</sup> However, press reports suggest that left-wing groups in the Netherlands and Germany may have provided PIRA cells with safe houses and transport, and might have reconnoitred potential targets on their behalf.<sup>85</sup> In the case of the Basque group ETA, the PIRA has a far

closer affinity due to the similarity of their respective nationalist struggles and their common Celtic bond. In 1979 one newspaper speculated thus on links between the PIRA and ETA, 'Those Provisionals who have gone off to the Basque organisation ETA . . . have gone in order to learn how to attack policemen and other high value targets even more effectively.'<sup>86</sup>

One possible foreign terrorist connection is with the Palestine Liberation Organisation (PLO). According to a NATO report, up to 44 PIRA operatives may have undergone training in the Lebanon during the late 1970s. However, this report appears to be inconclusive.<sup>87</sup>

At present the PIRA does not appear to be having any difficulty in recruiting. There are far fewer 'professional' volunteers than in the early and mid-1970s (Bishop and Mallie estimate 250 compared with 1,000 in the mid-1970s), but PIRA does not require as many as it is no longer attempting to wage a fully-fledged guerrilla war. The PIRA's aim now is merely to maintain a level of violence which is too great to be ignored, and, in the words of a PIRA commander, to ' . . . always retain the ability to bring the situation to a crisis'.<sup>88</sup> According to a journalist, Cal McCrystal, one can place PIRA volunteers in one of four categories: the badly educated 'lumpen bus-burners'; fairly well educated recruits who can infiltrate government bodies such as the civil service or the Housing Executive from which they can glean intelligence; graduates and tradesmen such as electricians, who provide the manpower for the ASUs; and the senior PIRA commanders, who may well have over ten years' experience of the Troubles.<sup>89</sup> As Bowyer-Bell points out, the PIRA leadership for the last twenty years has consisted of a small, tightly-knit group, and has thus built up a formidable wealth of experience, and continuity of purpose.<sup>90</sup>

McCrystal and other writers emphasise the extent to which antipathy to the security forces, due either to personal experiences or to nationalist sentiment, often provides a motive for joining the PIRA.<sup>91</sup> In the mid-1970s, a PIRA survey in the Maze prison found that 90 per cent of the Republican inmates had joined the PIRA in order to get revenge for 'harassment' by the security forces.<sup>92</sup> One point which is fairly clear is that members of the PIRA are not psychopaths. They appear to be ordinary people, if anything more intelligent than the average, who believe that their cause is worth killing for, and have therefore to an extent repressed the usual moral restraint against killing.<sup>93</sup> A secret British Army report of 1978 confirmed that the average volunteers were not 'mindless hooligans drawn from the unemployed or unemployable', but were chosen with some care and were growing in experience.<sup>94</sup> One problem which could arise is a result of the greater prominence given to PSF in the strategy of the Republican movement. If it is the case that most of the graduates and more experienced volunteers are being 'creamed off' by PSF it is possible that the competence of the PIRA will be affected.<sup>95</sup>

The PIRA needs money in order to pay for weapons, pay for travel tickets and hotel rooms for ASUs in England and abroad, maintain safe houses and carry out general administration. In the case of the Republican movement there is also the need to fund PSF in order to fight elections. PIRA is involved in many ways of making money, legal such as running drinking clubs and taxi firms, others illegal such as bank robbery, tax fraud, and extortion.<sup>96</sup> A recent government announcement estimated PIRA income at £5.3 million, broken down as follows:

Legitimate business	£1,000,000
Tax fraud	1,000,000
Taxis	600,000
Drinking clubs	750,000
Gaming machines	250,000
Pirate videos and smuggling	600,000
EC fraud	300,000
Protection and extortion	500,000
Collections	200,000
NORAIID and foreign	100,000
TOTAL	5,300,000 <sup>97</sup>

In its long-term aim of achieving an independent, united Ireland, the PIRA has not yet achieved its objective. However, it has achieved many of the objectives listed in the section on military strategy in the 'Green Book'. In terms of affecting British public opinion by killing soldiers the PIRA appears to have had some, though limited success. A recent poll in *The Guardian* indicated that 59 per cent of those polled favoured the withdrawal of British troops from Northern Ireland.<sup>98</sup> The PIRA has certainly made Northern Ireland uneconomic, to the extent where a survey on behalf of the Bank of Ireland estimated that the current 'Troubles' are costing Britain IR£358 million per year.<sup>99</sup> British government initiatives such as 'Ulsterisation' and the various proposed forms of devolution certainly give the impression that the government wishes to keep the Irish problem at arm's length, and, if given the chance, would be glad to be rid of the problem permanently. In this respect Patterson may be right in his supposition that, provided the PIRA can survive militarily and maintain a bedrock of support in the Catholic community, they will wear down the will of the British government to remain in Northern Ireland.<sup>100</sup>

The PIRA have succeeded in forcing Britain to govern by 'colonial military rule' in that they toppled Stormont, thereby forcing the British government to impose direct rule from Westminster, but have prevented the authorities from governing Northern Ireland in the same manner as they do in the rest of Britain. Furthermore, PIRA activities have forced

the Government to adopt such expedients as the juryless 'Diplock' courts and the censoring of Sinn Fein spokesmen on the broadcasting media, to maintain a semi-militarised police force in Northern Ireland, and to keep a large army presence in the Province.

The war in Northern Ireland has also had an adverse effect upon the British body politic. The demands of security mean that whilst increasing amounts of money are spent on the protection of politicians and public servants, they have become more remote from the people they govern.<sup>101</sup> Cases such as those of the Guildford Four, the Birmingham Six, and the Stalker affair have done much to diminish faith in the police, the judiciary, and the security services. Furthermore, the restrictions upon the broadcasting of comments by Sinn Fein spokesmen raise serious questions concerning the position of the media in a liberal democracy.

In terms of gaining national and international attention incidents such as the 1981 Hunger Strikes, 'Bloody Sunday', the European Court ruling that Britain had treated internees in a degrading and inhuman manner and other embarrassments, have ensured that the 'Troubles' have maintained a prominent place on the stages of world and domestic publicity. If it were not for atrocities, deliberate or not, such as the Enniskillen bombing, the PIRA might have quite a sympathetic audience.

Despite these achievements however, it is highly unlikely that the PIRA will succeed in achieving its ultimate aim. Although the PIRA claims, to some degree with justification, to be non-sectarian in the sense that sectarianism is not its main purpose, its aims and strategies almost totally ignore many of the realities of Northern Ireland. Representatives from PSF have spoken to Protestant organisations and at the 1990 *ard fheis* it was clear that the PSF leadership recognises that difficulties do exist.<sup>102</sup> However, the fact remains that not only do the vast majority of Protestants not want to join a united Ireland.<sup>103</sup>, but, in addition, the PIRA campaign by killing members from the predominantly Protestant RUC and UDR, and by killing civilians makes such a result seem even more abhorrent.

In an interview with David McKittrick, a senior member of the PIRA makes it clear that, whatever the wishes of the loyalist majority, they are expected to go along with their incorporation into a united Ireland without a murmur.<sup>104</sup> Even though he accepts that the PIRA may have embittered many Protestants he does not seem to perceive that the British might be unwilling, or indeed unable, to disarm the largely loyalist-inclined RUC and UDR, as well as the various loyalist paramilitary groups. Despite attempts to devise a coherent political platform aimed at attracting fairly widespread support, the PIRA by its campaign, and PSF by its support for that campaign, have repelled Ulster Protestants from the idea of a united Ireland.<sup>105</sup>

The tradition of militant republican nationalism will almost certainly

persist as long as Ireland remains partitioned. The social grievances of the northern Catholics, their fear of loyalist violence, and their perception of the Crown forces as repressive and partial will ensure that the PIRA or a similar organisation will continue to exist in Northern Ireland.<sup>106</sup> However, the activities of the PIRA have done much to discredit the concept of a united Ireland in the eyes of northern Protestants. The tragedy of the PIRA is that if a united Ireland ever does come about, it is extremely likely that it will be despite the efforts of the PIRA and not because of them.

## NOTES

1. See T.P. Coogan, *The IRA* (Glasgow: Fontana, 1987), p.685; J. Bowyer-Bell, *The Secret Army: The IRA from 1916* (Dublin: Academy Press, 1979), p.154.
2. See P. Bishop and E. Mallie, *The Provisional IRA* (London: Corgi, 1988), p.134; K.J. Kelley, *The Longest War: Northern Ireland and the IRA* (London: Zed Books, 1988), pp.88-9.
3. Bishop and Mallie, op. cit., p.133; Bowyer-Bell, op. cit., pp.363-4.
4. Kelley, op. cit., p.121; H. Patterson, *The Politics of Illusion* (London: Hutchinson, 1989), p.66.
5. Bishop and Mallie, op. cit., pp.112, 116, 121-2; Kelley, op. cit., p.121.
6. Bowyer-Bell, op. cit., p.135; Patterson, op. cit., p.98.
7. Bishop and Mallie, op. cit., pp.135-7; Patterson, op. cit., pp.126-7.
8. Coogan, op. cit., p.685.
9. M. Dillon, *The Dirty War* (London: Hutchinson, 1990), p.482.
10. Patterson, op. cit., p.23.
11. See G. Adams, *The Politics of Irish Freedom* (Dingle: Brandon, 1986), p.47; 'Gerry Adams Takes Over as IRA Chief', *The Sunday Times*, 4 Aug. 1985.
12. Kelley, op. cit., p.283.
13. See 'Inside the IRA', *The Sunday Times*, 3 July 1977.
14. Ibid. See also 'Gerry Adams Takes Over as IRA Chief', op. cit.; Bishop and Mallie, op. cit., p.387.
15. Bishop and Mallie, op. cit., pp.192, 196-9, 220; Kelley, op. cit., pp.137, 157; S. MacStiofain, *Revolutionary in Ireland* (Edinburgh: Gordon Cremonesi, 1975), p.295.
16. Bishop and Mallie, op. cit., pp.152, 154, 188, 192, 202; Bowyer-Bell, op. cit., p.383.
17. 'Inside the IRA', op. cit.
18. See J. Holland, *The American Connection: US Guns, Money and Influence in Northern Ireland* (Dublin: Poolbeg, 1987), p.89; Bishop and Mallie, op. cit., pp.169, 197.
19. Statistics on Security: Part 1 Statistics of Terrorist Activity. Yearly 1971-1988 (Northern Ireland Office, 1989).
20. Ibid. See also Bishop and Mallie, op. cit., p.193.
21. Bowyer-Bell, op. cit., pp.406, 437; Bishop and Mallie, op. cit., pp.171, 196.
22. L. Clarke, *Broadening the Battlefield: The H-Blocks and the Rise of Sinn Fein* (Dublin: Gill & Macmillan, 1987), pp.40-42; Bishop and Mallie, op. cit., pp.241, 247, 320.
23. Kelley, op. cit., pp.172, 175.
24. MacStiofain, op. cit., pp.281-5; Kelley, op. cit., pp.180-81.
25. Clarke, op. cit., p.35; Bishop and Mallie, op. cit., p.275.
26. Bishop and Mallie, op. cit., p.277.
27. Clarke, op. cit., p.29.
28. Coogan, op. cit., p.682.
29. See 'What's on the Agenda Now is an End to Partition', *The Irish Times*, 12 Oct. 1986.
30. Coogan, op. cit., p.605.
31. Bishop and Mallie, op. cit., p.412.
32. Kelley, op. cit., pp.356-7; Bishop and Mallie, op. cit., pp.385, 458.



33. Kelley, op. cit., p.359; Bishop and Mallie, op. cit., p.451.
34. Kelley, op. cit., p.127. See also 'Veteran Opposes SF Going into Dail', *The Irish Times*, 29 Oct. 1985.
35. Clarke, op. cit., pp.41-2, 251-3; Bowyer-Bell, op. cit., p.437; Kelley, op. cit., p.285.
36. J. Bowyer-Bell, *IRA Tactics and Targets: An Analysis of Tactical Aspects of the Armed Struggle 1969-1989* (Dublin: Poolbeg, 1990), p.89; Bishop and Mallie, op. cit., p.312; Kelley, op. cit., pp.246-7.
37. Bowyer-Bell (1990), op. cit., pp.27, 48, 116.
38. Ibid., pp.63, 67, 115. Also the roll of honour on the 1990 Republican Resistance calendar lists the volunteers involved in the 1987 Gibraltar operation as GHQ members rather than as members of any geographic formation.
39. Bishop and Mallie, op. cit., p.331; Kelley, op. cit., pp.210, 265; Clarke, op. cit., p.42; Bowyer-Bell (1979), op. cit., p.404.
40. Bishop and Mallie, op. cit., pp.379, 412; Kelley, op. cit., pp.289-93. See also 'This Town Ain't Big Enough', *New Statesman & Society*, 27 July 1990.
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42. Bishop and Mallie, op. cit., pp.204, 420.
43. Bishop and Mallie, op. cit., p.425.
44. See 'MP Left Himself Open to Attack from Terrorists', *The Independent*, 31 July 1990; 'Seven People Sought After Bomb Kills 11', *The Times*, 5 Feb. 1974. (This refers to a bomb explosion on board a bus, carrying soldiers and their families along the M62 motorway in England. The death toll subsequently rose to 12.) 'London IRA Bomb Kills Soldier', *The Independent*, 17 May 1990; 'IRA Bomb Kills Former Reservist', *The Independent*, 7 June 1990.
45. See 'Car Bomb Attack on Thatcher Advisor Fails', *The Independent*, 7 Aug. 1990; 'Booby-trap Bomb Maims General', *The Sunday Times*, 18 Oct. 1981.
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48. Bishop and Mallie, op. cit., p.220; Clarke, op. cit., p.18; Bowyer-Bell (1990), op. cit., pp.83-4.
49. Adams, op. cit., pp.35-6.
50. Bowyer-Bell (1990), op. cit., pp.85-8; Bishop and Mallie, op. cit., p.232; Coogan, op. cit., p.480.
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52. See 'Security Storm Over Blame for Judge's Murder', *The Sunday Times*, 26 April 1987; 'Judge Booked Fatal Trip in his Own Name', *The Times*, 27 April 1987; 'Judge was Irked by Security', *The Times*, 28 April 1987.
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56. See 'IRA's New Tactic Breaches Security Forces' Defences', *The Independent*, 25 Oct. 1990.
57. See 'IRA Uses Human Bombs', *The Independent*, 25 Oct. 1990; 'Deadly Precision of Terrorists' New Tactic', *The Sunday Correspondent*, 28 Oct. 1990.
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  70. See 'Shift in Politics Forces Move Out of Province', *The Sunday Correspondent*, 17 June 1990; 'One Small Cell Attacking the Body Politic', *The Independent on Sunday*, 1 July 1990.
  71. A.P. Schmid and J. de Graaf, *Violence as Communication: Insurgent Terrorism and the Western News Media* (London: Sage Publications, 1982), p. 43.
  72. See 'New Perils Facing UK Soldiers', *The Sunday Correspondent*, 3 June 1990.
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  76. See 'The Men of War Promise Third Violent Decade', op. cit.
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  78. See 'McAlpine Bomb Indicates Switch in IRA Campaign', *The Independent*, 14 June 1990; 'Car Bomb Attack on Thatcher Advisor Fails', op. cit.
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103. See 'Ulster Catholics Split on Pull Out', op. cit.
104. See 'The Men of War Promise Third Violent Decade', op. cit.
105. 'Ulster Catholics Split on Pull Out', op. cit.
106. See C. Hewitt, 'Terrorism and Public Opinion: A Five Country Comparison', *Terrorism and Political Violence*, Vol.2, No.2 (Summer 1990), pp.165-6, 170.